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The Swiss Labor Market Survey 1998 (SLMS 98)

By Ben Jann

1. Introduction

Working life is one of the core topics in social sciences. In recent decades a variety of surveys have been institutionalized all over the world to study different aspects of labor market such as, e.g., labor market participation, unemployment, working hours, working conditions, work orientation, etc. On the one hand, there are official surveys which mainly yield internationally comparable measures of more or less standardized labor market indicators – the “objective” and economic side of working life, so to speak. On the other hand, surveys such as, e.g., the ISSP (International Social Survey Programme) have a strong focus on the “subjective” side of working life, e.g., work orientation and work values.

In 1998, however, when we went into the field with the Swiss Labor Market Survey, no recent survey covering working life in general existed in Switzerland. Therefore, our goal was to conduct a survey which incorporated a variety of topics related to labor. First, we tried to combine the above mentioned “objective” and “subjective” aspects of working life. We replicated and extended the core part of the Swiss Labour Force Survey (an annual survey conducted by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office since 1991 which is used to estimate Swiss labor market indicators; see Bundesamt für Statistik 1996) and included the 1997 ISSP module on “Work Orientations”. Second, we designed the questionnaire to cover related topics such as socio-political orientations (including a partial replication of the 1996 ISSP module “Role of Government”), membership in interest organizations and trade unions, personal employment history, family biography and extensive socio-demographics.

The Swiss Labor Market Survey was financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation within the Swiss Priority Program (SPP) “Switzerland: Towards the Future”. The survey is part of the joint project entitled “The Future of Working Life” and was conducted under the supervision of Andreas Diekmann, Henriette Engelhardt, and Ben Jann (Institute for Sociology, University of Bern, project segment: “Working conditions, work orientation, and labor market participation”) as well as Klaus Armingeon and Simon Geissbüh-

ler (Institute of Political Science, University of Bern, project segment: “Socio-political orientations of employees. Alignments, membership in and hostility to interest organizations and political parties”). Please see the project web pages (www.soz.unibe.ch/forschung/wl) for further details.

2. Design and Sample

The Swiss Labor Market Survey 1998 (SLMS 98) consists of 3028 computer-aided telephone interviews (CATI) and 2535 follow-up written interviews of a random sample of permanent residents of Switzerland aged between 18 and 70. The final sample was determined by a two-stage selection process. First, a random sample of households was drawn from the official telephone directory. Second, in each household a target person was selected at random by computer. The telephone interviews were conducted between May and October 1998 and on average took 40 minutes. Participants of the telephone interview were asked to complete a follow-up written questionnaire which contained the entire 1997 ISSP module on “Work Orientations” and parts of the 1996 ISSP module on the “Role of Government”. The response rate for the telephone interviews was 63.0% and 83.7% of the participants returned the follow-up written questionnaire (which leaves an overall response rate for the written interviews of 52.8%). See Diekmann et al. (1999a) for details of the main survey, as well as Armingeon et al. (1999) and Diekmann et al. (1999b) for the 1996 and the 1997 ISSP modules, respectively.

In addition, a mail survey was conducted between April and July 2000 with a random sub-sample of the SLMS 98. The goal of the panel study was to test the reliability of a number of ISSP scales, to monitor the diffusion of computers in the workplace, and to provide detailed information about job-finding. Furthermore, the sample was randomly divided into several experimental groups to study the effect of incentives on response rates (for the findings see Diekmann and Jann 2001a, 2002). The mean response rate of the panel wave was 75.2% (652 written interviews). See Diekmann and Jann (2001b) for details.

3. Contents

As mentioned above, the survey covers a variety of aspects related to working life and the labor market. Box 1 gives an overview of the topics included in the main survey of 1998 and box 2 lists the contents of the panel wave in the year 2000.

*Box 1***Contents of the Swiss Labor Market Survey 1998 (SLMS 98)***Telephone Interview 1998 (N = 3028)*

- Household structure (age and sex of all household members) and nationality
- Sociopolitical orientation: Membership in and hostility to interest organizations, trade unions, and political parties, political orientation, etc.
- Employment status, reasons for non-employment
- Working conditions (non-employed: last job; employed: current job): occupation, job-finding, job characteristics, occupational activities, working hours, overtime, occupational position, self-employment, work effort, use of computers, tele-work, characteristics of employer, economic sectors, etc.
- Employment history
- Education
- Family: marital status, characteristics of partner, children, divorce, social origin, etc.
- Various socio-demographics and other topics: religious affiliation, income, military rank, voting behavior, etc.
- Interviewer questions

Follow-up written questionnaire (N = 2535)

- Excerpts from ISSP 1996 “Role of Government”
- Environmental consciousness
- ISSP 1997 “Work Orientations”
- Control questions (sex, birth date) and religious affiliation

Generated variables

- Details on telephone interview and place of residence, weights, sex, age, income, occupational classifications (ISCO-88), etc.

Total number of variables: 604

*Box 2***Contents of the panel wave 2000**

Written questionnaire (N = 652)

- Environmental consciousness
- Excerpts from ISSP 1997 “Work Orientations”
- Employment status
- On-the-job use of computers and the internet
- Job-finding (search activities, search costs, etc.)
- Control questions (sex, birth date), income
- Generated variables: weights, age, response characteristics, employment status 1998, etc.

Total number of variables: 131

4. Selected studies

First of all, the survey may obviously be used to study in detail forms of work organization, working conditions and work values (e.g., Diekmann, Engelhardt, and Jann 1999). Furthermore, Engelhardt and Jann (2002) study the role of work effort on female labor market participation, Fischer (2000) analyzes the relation between gender, labor market participation and participation in politics, and Diekmann, Engelhardt, and Jann (2000) compare the economic structure of the Swiss labor market with those of Germany and the USA.

Further papers are concerned with political aspects of working life. Geissbühler (2001b) and Armingeon (2001b) analyze the socio-political orientations of employees in Switzerland and in international comparison. The role of trade unions on the Swiss labor market is discussed by Armingeon (2000a, c), Armingeon and Beyeler (2000), as well as Geissbühler (2000, 2001a).

Last but not least, an important task in labor economics is the influence of the adoption of new technologies on productivity and, therefore, on labor market opportunities. The effect of the use of computers and the internet on wages is analyzed by Franzen (2001). And Franzen and Jann (2001) study the influence of computer adoption in the workplace on occupational upward mobility.

Many further issues relating to working life can also be analyzed using the SLMS 98 (e.g., the relationship between military service and civilian occupa-

tional success, see Jann 2003). And, since the survey provides additional information on various other topics and contains a lot of socio-demographics, it may also be used to study issues not directly related to the labor market. For example, the SLMS 98 has been used in papers about the stability of the political coalition in Switzerland (Armingeon 1999), the voting behavior of Swiss citizens on foreign policy issues (Armingeon 2000b), and the institutionalization of the Swiss welfare state (Armingeon 2001a).

5. Data access

The data and complete documentation (in German) of the SLMS 98 and the panel 2000 can be ordered from the Swiss Information and Data Archive Service for the Social Sciences (SIDOS), 13, ruelle Vaucher, CH-2000 Neuchâtel (www.sidos.ch), or the Central Archive for Empirical Social Research (ZA), University of Cologne, PO Box 410960, D-50869 Köln (www.gesis.org/za). A small administrative fee is charged. The documentation and codebook of the survey may also be downloaded from the project website (www.soz.uni-be.ch/forschung/wl).

Additionally, parts of the survey are included in the ISSP modules of 1996 ("Role of Government III") and 1997 ("Work Orientations II") which provide standardized information on several topics for many countries worldwide. The ISSP data are accompanied with documentation in English and can also be accessed via SIDOS and ZA.

6. Teaching

The SLMS 98 is well-suited for teaching basic and advanced statistical methods. Since the survey provides information on a lot of different topics, it can be used as a rich resource to illustrate statistical concepts. First, the data may provide examples for use in scripts and textbooks (see Jann 2002, a textbook on elementary statistics, in which extensive use is made of the SLMS 98). Second, the survey is well-suited for training in the computer laboratory since its structure is relatively simple. In particular, each of the different measurement levels is covered by a variety of variables and one can find applications for most of the common statistical instruments (such as univariate and bivariate measures, linear, logistic, truncated, and ordinal regression, event history analysis, variance and factor analysis, and much more).

As mentioned above, the data can be accessed via SIDOS or ZA. Additionally, a small exercise dataset (including data in SPSS- and Stata-format, exercises for basic statistics, as well as some documentation) can be accessed via the project web site.

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